



January 13, 2022

Re: NPCA urges swift passage of a full-year appropriations bill to provide needed relief for national parks

Dear Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger:

On behalf of the National Parks Conservation Association's (NPCA) more than 1.6 million members and supporters nationwide, **we urge you to expeditiously move forward with an FY22 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill.**

Since 1919, NPCA has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. Among our deepest concerns for the park system is the challenge of rampant underfunding of our parks and supporting offices and its impacts on park personnel, resources and visitors. Another continuing resolution (CR) would further challenge National Park Service (NPS) superintendents in managing their budgets and planning ahead for the busy summer season. Worse, a year-long CR would prevent the direly needed and significant investments proposed by both the House and Senate bills.

Of note, the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development; Commerce, Justice, and Science; and Energy and Water appropriations bills also contain important funding for park transportation, marine sanctuaries, climate science, and Everglades restoration. Moving ahead with these bills is also needed. As one example of the challenges the current CR is posing, the recent bipartisan infrastructure bill established a new wildlife crossing program to reduce wildlife and motorist collisions; however, the Department of Transportation cannot implement the program until there is a full year appropriations bill.

National parks support the national and local economies and accommodate hundreds of millions of visitors per year while protecting our historic and natural treasures. They provide opportunities to learn about our history, recreate with our families, unwind, and experience the awe of nature. They are widely popular with the American public and park rangers are commonly recognized as among the nation's most beloved public servants.

Yet while visitation has steadily increased in recent years—including record increases this past year—the staffing of our parks has gradually decreased. Between 2011 and 2019, the National Park Service experienced a 16 percent erosion of personnel while at the same time struggling to accommodate a 17 percent increase in visitation. These statistics are likely to be more sobering when 2021 figures are released. The impacts of these dual challenges cannot be overstated, which points to the importance of securing increases in an FY22 bill.

Park personnel perform multiple duties to try to make up for the erosion of staffing, stretching them thin and undermining the work for which they were hired. Resource specialists, trail crews and others are diverted to duties focused on accommodating visitors, such as parking cars and enforcing parking regulations, upkeeping bathrooms and other visitor facilities, and ensuring visitors are well-prepared for recreational activities that could pose a threat to their well-being and lead to search-and-rescues. As a result, the resource work that is already challenged falls behind, including to research climate change impacts and develop tools to adapt our parks to it.

NPS funding challenges and the subsequent relief offered in the House and Senate Interior and Environment bills go beyond park operations and climate change adaptation. Needs and proposed relief that would be precluded by a CR include but are not limited to:

- **Park operations:** Over the decade, the park system has lost roughly 3,500 staff. The House and Senate bills seek to return approximately 1,000 staff (in FTEs) to NPS. The House bill provides a needed \$287 million (an 11% increase) while the Senate provides a \$251 million (a 9% increase).
- **Adaptation to a changing climate:** The investments in park operations, line-item construction and other accounts are critical to meet scientific, staffing and facilities needs related to climate change. Climate change is disproportionately harming and threatening our national parks, from sea-level rise threatening coastal structures and ecosystems to wildfires threatening homes, facilities and wildlife habitats, to air, water quality, wildlife and human health concerns. Funding increases are needed to address these threats.
- **Cultural resource protection:** National parks protect and help interpret our cultural and history, while local economies benefit from community-driven efforts to support historic preservation and interpretation projects with NPS resources. NPS lacks trained cultural resource experts to manage, protect, and interpret our national patrimony to the standards they deserve and that the public wants. The operations increases are needed in addition to House and Senate proposed increases for the Heritage Partnership Program (a 14% increase in both bills) and the Historic Preservation Fund (an 8% increase in the House and a 25% increase in the Senate).

These and other investments are long overdue and critically needed for park resources, staff, visitors and the countless local economies that depend on functional and thriving national parks. Again, we urge you to move forward with full-year FY22 appropriations bills. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

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Your parks. Your turn.